

2014 Technology Innovation Showcase

Barcode and RFID Tracking System – DeKalb County Government

Complexity of the Problem

Keeping track of the numerous documents and files associated with legal actions as they wind their way through court proceedings can be an enormously confusing and frustrating challenge. The DeKalb County Marshal's Office serves over 75,000 documents each year; meanwhile, the Clerk of Courts Office is responsible for maintaining an equal number of case files. Deputies and court officials lacked an efficient and reliable way to track the documents. As a result, plaintiffs and others directly connected to a court case did not always receive current, accurate information about the delivery of important documents in civil court proceedings, and court officials ran the risk of losing critical case files.

Creativity of the Solution

The State Court in DeKalb County partnered with the Magistrate Court of DeKalb County, the DeKalb County Clerk of Courts Office and the DeKalb County Marshal's Office to automate the process of tracking warrants, other service papers and case files through barcoding and radio frequency identification (RFID). The project is the first of its kind in the nation.

Here's how it all works. The Marshal's Office receives multi-part paper warrants from the Clerk of Courts Office, which serves both the State Court and the Magistrate's Court. DeKalb County uses Banner, a case management system, to print a barcode for each warrant. Personnel in the Marshal's Office sort the warrants by zip code and place them in bins. Deputies take stacks of warrants from the bins and deliver them. As deputies deliver warrants and other service papers, they use a Motorola MC55A handheld, barcode scanning device to scan the documents. The device transmits data to the case management database. Deputies then return the remainder of the multi-part form to the Clerk of Courts Office, where it's filed and ready for circulation to officials in either the State Court or the Magistrate Court.

Meanwhile, an RFID tag is also affixed to every case file in the State Court and the Magistrate Court. The tags are automatically read by RFID antennas, and the location of the case file is fed into a document tracking application. Court officials use the search function on a handheld device to locate particular case files. The device emits an audible alarm when it finds a case file, and it can read data programmed into barcodes. The systems are intentionally engineered for information from the case management system to be shared with the document tracking system. The use of RFID technology makes it possible for court officials to determine the location of critical case files as they are moved from courtrooms to judges' chambers to staff and the Clerk of Courts Office.

Business Results

The use of barcodes by the Marshal's Office and RFID tags by the courts was planned and implemented as a single project to improve operational efficiencies through seamless, complementary processes that help ensure the timely resolution of court cases. The new technology and business processes also enable court officials to provide the general public with greater transparency into judicial processes by ultimately linking the data gathered by the barcode and RFID tags to a public-facing website where anyone can search for information about the status of court cases.